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Chile Government to Avoid Open Clash with Frei

The Pinochet government evidently intends a modest reaction to a recently published criticism of its policies by former president Eduardo Frei, leader of Chile's largest political party, the Christian Democrats. Frei's criticisms were printed for the party by the official press of the Catholic Church and are being circulated by hand among Christian Democrats and trusted sympathizers of the party.

President Pinochet, though angry, has decided not to make an issue of Frei's attack, probably recognizing that strong retaliation would merely help the faltering

Christian Democrats and further damage Chile's reputation abroad. The government is trying to ride out a diplomatic storm created by charges that Chilean security forces tortured a British doctor.

Pinochet's unusually cautious reaction could also stem from an unwillingness to open a new dispute with the Catholic Church. The strain in church-state relations was recently repaired by personal meetings between Cardinal Silva and Pinochet.

Pinochet may yet harden his position. Yesterday, Frei rebuffed an offer by the Junta to participate in a "council of state"

composed of former presidents like Frei and other distinguished citizens. Pinochet had hoped to create a favorable impression by instituting the council, which was given formal status in a ceremony on December 31. The council is supposed to advise the government on important matters, but it is not expected to be much more than window-dressing.

Frei, in announcing his refusal to join the council, said it would not be "honest or loyal" for him to take part in a body whose basis of origin and powers of representation were in question.

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